



Representative
Larry Crouse
4th District



1998 session report: working to keep our promises

January 1998

Dear neighbors,

When the Republicans took over control of the state House of Representatives following the 1994 elections, we pledged to make fundamental reforms in the way government operates. Our objectives have been to:

- ***Make government more accountable to taxpayers***
- ***Make government more responsive to the public***
- ***Improve the way government treats its citizens***
- ***Reduce unnecessary and unwarranted government interference in the lives of individuals and families***

Over the past three years, the Legislature has adopted and enacted a number of important laws that go a long way toward reaching these goals.

This newsletter covers some important issues that have been addressed by the Legislature, as well as key issues that are before us during the 1998 session, which began Jan. 12 and is scheduled to end March 12.

If you have any comments, concerns or questions about the issues discussed in this newsletter, or if you need a hand in dealing with a problem involving a state agency, please contact my Olympia office. I'm happy to help you.

Sincerely,

We promised to rein in state spending and reduce taxes, and we did

After watching the state operating budget grow at a tremendous rate for many years, we managed to drastically slow the growth of spending without harming essential state services. Thanks to this prudent budget approach and a strong, diversified economy, our state currently enjoys a budget surplus of more than \$860 million.

What happens next: We will continue to protect taxpayers by holding the line on state spending and vigorously opposing any attempts to undo or weaken the Initiative

601 spending limit adopted by Washington voters. Over the past three years, we've been able to provide tax relief to businesses and individuals who were hit hard by large tax increases in 1993, and we hope to continue to lower taxes this year. One area in particular that we will focus on is lowering the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (which you pay when you buy your license tabs each year). However, we also want to place about \$500 million of the surplus in a reserve fund in case Washington faces an economic downturn that results in a sharp drop in state revenue.

Olympia office:

331 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
(360) 786-7820
E-mail: crouse_la@leg.wa.gov

Mailing address:

PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

House committees:

Appropriations
Energy and Utilities, *chairman*

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

We promised to improve K-12 education, and we did

Instead of merely throwing money at the problems facing our public schools, the Legislature has approved a number of bills to help our schools do a better job of teaching students the basic knowledge and skills they need. These measures cut bureaucratic red tape so that teachers have the freedom to teach and schools have the local control they need to do a better job, direct more resources into the classroom, improve the teaching of reading skills in early grades, increase discipline, and improve safety in our schools. For those who complain that the Legislature has short-changed schools and children, consider these facts regarding education spending in the 1997-99 operating budget:

- \$8.9 billion in total spending for K-12 education, an increase of \$168 per student — K-12 spending accounts for nearly half of the entire state budget
- Increases in salaries that will maintain Washington teachers' pay among the top 20 in the nation
- \$39 million to enhance learning technology in the classroom
- \$20 million for instructional materials which will provide \$458 for the average-size classroom
- \$51 million to help schools make the transition to the performance assessment system (such as the fourth-grade testing that occurred recently) that is essential to education reforms
- \$10 million for student learning improvement grants
- \$4.3 million for reading initiatives to assess second-graders' fluency and accuracy in reading and to provide teacher training so that we can ensure every student learns to read by the third grade
- \$2.9 million for gifted program funding
- \$1 million for alternative education programs for students who have dropped out or have been expelled
- \$2.4 million for levy equalization, which provides extra funding for poor school districts that are subject to the highest property tax rates
- Full funding for the state's share of all locally approved school construction projects over the next two years

While progress has been made on K-12 education, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Last spring, fourth-grade students across Washington took a set of new tests. The tests were designed to measure their knowledge of the state's essential academic learning requirements, as established by the Legislature in 1993. The tests were difficult. They measured skills fourth-graders previously have not been asked to demonstrate, such as writing stories and descriptive essays, using math skills to solve complex problems and explaining answers. The tests focused on four areas of basic skill. Here are the statewide results:

Listening - 62 percent met or exceeded the standard

Reading - 48 percent met or exceeded the standard

Writing - 42 percent met or exceeded the standard

Mathematics - 22 percent met or exceeded the standard

While the results are disappointing, they also provide us with a starting point for needed change.

What happens next: There are a number of education topics before us this session, including development of an accountability system for K-4 reading, development of a reading initiative aimed at improving beginning reading skills, providing parents with additional choice options on where their children attend school, parents rights, protecting the privacy rights of students, and defining the state "certificate of mastery" required of future high school graduates.



1998 session report: working to keep our promises



We promised to get tougher on crime, and we did

Our state's juvenile justice system has long been considered a joke by many juvenile offenders. Last year, we passed a measure that revamps the system. The new law ensures that juvenile offenders will face some type of punishment, starting with the first offense. It also will automatically send 16- and 17-year-old offenders to adult court for many serious crimes. The Legislature also has passed measures that crack down on violent criminals, and keep dangerous sex offenders out of our neighborhood.

What happens next: This session there are several issues dealing with some aspect of criminal justice. Perhaps the issue receiving the most attention is drinking and driving. Many bills have been introduced that would impose tougher penalties against drunk driving. A measure has been introduced by Rep. Sterk to battle domestic violence. Group homes for juvenile offenders will be examined in the wake of two separate incidents in which group home residents escaped from authorities and later were involved in murder cases. We want to do a better job of managing, monitoring and controlling

those offenders who are in group homes or in nonsecure facilities. Finally, a strong effort will be made to increase criminal justice funding for city and county governments so they have the necessary resources to effectively fight crime.

We promised to reform the welfare system, and we did

We've reformed a welfare system that once gave recipients absolutely no incentives to find work and become self-supporting. The state's new welfare reform law makes it clear that recipients can be on welfare for only five years (in most cases) and they must try to find work, but it also promises to provide the training and child-care assistance necessary to make self-sufficiency a reality. It also authorizes the suspension of any state-issued business, occupational or driver's license for a parent who is more than six months behind in his or her child support payments.

What happens next: The Legislature will monitor the progress of welfare reform in our state. We want to make sure that these reforms are implemented properly and continue to make changes that prevent fraud and abuse so we can build upon the early successes in reducing welfare caseloads and helping people find and obtain the jobs they need.

Other key objectives in 1998

Solving transportation needs — without a gas tax increase: Our state continues to face a number of long-term transportation challenges. Many highways are plagued with gridlock during the workweek. This severe traffic congestion not only is frustrating for commuters, it



delays the time that businesses can deliver their goods to ports and other key points.

House and Senate Republicans recently unveiled a funding package that would provide \$2.4 billion over the next six years for transportation projects around the state, without raising the gas tax. If the proposal is approved by the Legislature, it would go before state voters as a referendum. If it becomes law, the plan could provide needed funding for many Spokane-area projects, including the Evergreen Interchange, Harvard Road, Sprague Street Overpass, and lane expansion on Interstate 90 from Sprague Street to Harvard Road. The plan also would cut the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax by about

\$45 per vehicle, which is good news for everyone, especially seniors on fixed incomes. The proposal would also provide an additional 10 percent in criminal justice funding for city and county governments.

Safeguarding privacy: With the advances in computers and technology, it has become easier for personal information to be accessed. As a result, your privacy can be in jeopardy. The Legislature will work to protect individuals and families by working to safeguard privacy of personal information. We share Gov. Locke's concern about a potential for invasion of people's personal lives as information becomes more accessible.

Listen in on the Legislature

Any citizen with a computer with sound system and access to the Internet can listen to all deliberations of the Legislature live. The deliberations are also stored for later access on demand.



This service is free and is provided by TVW, the statewide nonprofit television network which is the equivalent of C-SPAN at the national level. Just visit TVW's web site at www.tvw.org. The software required — RealAudio — is also free and can be downloaded over the Internet from www.real.com.



BULK RATE
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing

4th District
1998 session report:
working to keep
our promises

Rep. Larry Crouse
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Printed on recycled paper